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The Influence of Culture on Soccer Players Verbal Reactions

Margit KRAUSE-ONO

サッカー選手の振る舞いに及ぼす 文化の影響とその理由

クラウゼ＝小野・マルギット

要旨：

Behavioral values, rules and patterns of one culture are usually mirrored in its verbal communicative style. The reaction of German and Japanese soccer players to their (non)-nomination for their national teams is a rare opportunity to compare these styles in a 100% comparable setting. The main behavioral and verbal traits of each culture will be introduced and contrasted. German communicative style is direct, content-related and less situation-bound, while Japanese verbal communicative style is more indirect, clearly situation-related and refers more to the in-group.

In the analysis of the verbal reaction of a total of four soccer players, it will be shown that their comments and reactions are very much in accord with the behavioral cultural exigencies of their respective cultures. The German players did not mind appearances and the Japanese players did not express their feelings directly but rather referred to their in-groups. The direct comparison of Japanese and German reactions in the same situation highlights these points clearly.

It will be asserted that the overall tendencies of the two cultures, represented by soccer-players well-known in their countries, display the above mentioned differences.

キーワード: verbal communicative style, German culture, Japanese culture, cultural influence

Introduction

According to Ekman and Oster (1979), the facial expression of emotions like happiness, sadness, anger, disgust, fear, etc. are universal. However, the ways these emotions are verbally expressed differ according to cultural background, context, upbringing, socialization and so forth. I have the rare chance to be able to compare two identical situations which occurred recently in two completely different cultures - Germany and Japan - during the preparations for the 2006 Soccer

World Cup. On May 15th, 2006, the members of each national team were announced. In both countries there were two notable surprises in these announcements. I am, therefore, going to analyze the reactions of soccer players to their nomination/non-nomination to their respective national teams. The analysis will be based on studies about main values and prevalent behavioral patterns, including expected or non-expected ones, in both German and Japanese cultures as reflected in their respective communicative styles. I will also examine if and how the verbal reactions of the soccer players correlate with previous studies conducted on their respective cultures.

Japanese culture and verbal communicative style

Unfortunately there are not many studies which directly compare German and Japanese verbal communicative styles, but, as George Mead (1934) has shown, culture always influences language and vice-versa. A vast literature exists on Japan, its culture, language and people. Some of these texts have become classics like those written by Ruth Benedict (1946), Edwin O. Reischauer (1967), Takeo Doi (1971), and Chie Nakane (1967). All of them posit Japanese culture as collectivistic and Hofstede (1980) has proposed that this view is also held by the Japanese themselves. However, in recent years this view has been questioned (Markus and Kitayama 1991; Triandis 1995). In particular, Takano und Osaka (1999) doubt Hofstede's definitions of collectivism and individualism, which are merely based on work-related values, some of which are quite questionable in their definition. Takano and Osaka (1999) show in different studies that the contrary of Hofstede's results can also be reached. As long as a clear-cut definition of individualism or individuality is lacking, it is problematic to stipulate Japanese, and also other Asian cultures, as collectivistic. Especially as both terms, and the ideas which underlie them, were coined in Western cultures (Morisaki 2004; Takano & Osaka, 1999).

There are, however, certain traits in Japanese culture which seem to give, unlike German culture, more focus on the 'other' than the 'self'. However, in this case too studies show that the self can only ever be constructed in relation to others, no matter if the individual belongs to an Eastern or a Western culture, because if there is a lack of comparison, there is no self (Bolten, 2001). It can become a major false attribution error if these traits are equalized with non-individualism or pure collectivism (Takano and Osaka, 1999). Rather, the question is about what is valued more in a society, as this value will be mirrored in its language and use of language. Or putting it in Watzlawick's (1990) terms: Is the content of the message more important or is it rather how the message is transmitted - the 'what' or the 'how'.

From an early age in the Japanese child's sociolinguistic development there is, through the choice of language and the cultural concepts that underlie them, much emphasis placed on the correct form of reciprocal behavior in human relationships, in which emotional importance is especially stressed. Concepts such as *amae* 'sweetening' (Doi, 1971), *enryo* 'restraint' (Inoue,

1977) and *haji* ‘shame’ or ‘embarrassment’ (Inoue, 1977) all are used to define the notions of ‘self’ and ‘other’. *Amae* is not only found in the *oyako-kankei* ‘parent-child relationship’, but is also found in various relationships at work places and throughout society, where people are mostly linked in a *kohai-sempai* ‘junior-senior’ or *oyabun-kobun* ‘boss-subordinate’ relationship (Suzuki, 1986). The amount of *amae* given or requested has to be well balanced and this fine adjustment demands delicacy and tact. Usually *amae* is offset by *enryo* ‘restraint’. These three major traits, and one could well add also *sasshi* ‘able to guess/understanding’ (Nakane, 1967), are closely connected with the concept of *seken* ‘the others’ – the basic reference for outward behaviour (Inoue, 1977). They would not be so explicitly linguistically present, if the point of departure were only the self and not, also, ‘the others’. However, they do not describe static positions, but change according to the situation and *basho* ‘place’ an individual finds him/herself in.

Bachnik (1986) wrote, “[in Japanese society] rather than there being a single social reality, a number of possible perspectives of both self and social life are acknowledged. Interaction in Japanese society then focuses on the selection of the appropriate choice, out of all the various possibilities. This means that what one says and does will be different in different situations, depending on how one defines one's particular perspective versus the social other” (p. 69).

“The self”, Kimura (cited in Hamaguchi, 1985) claimed, “is neither a substance nor an attribute having a constant oneness” (p. 302). According to Hamaguchi (1985), for the Japanese “...selfness is not a constant like the ego but denotes a fluid concept which changes through time and situations according to interpersonal relationships” (p. 302).

Miyamoto, Fugita and Kashima (2002) call the same concept TAO (Taking the Attitude of the Other). Striving for reciprocity in relationships is valued more than individual satisfaction. Thus, Hamaguchi for example, reported that for the Japanese “the straightforward claim of the naked ego” is experienced as childish (1985: p. 303). Self-assertion is viewed more as being immature rather than as being authentic. This point is echoed in M. White and LeVine's (1986), cited in Markus & Kitayama (1991) description of the meaning of *sunao*:

“A child that is *sunao* has not yielded his or her personal autonomy for the sake of cooperation; cooperation does not suggest giving up the self, as it may in the West; it implies that working with others is the appropriate way of expressing and enhancing the self” (p. 58).

Giving in is not a sign of weakness; rather, it reflects tolerance, self-control, flexibility, and maturity. The translation of the well-known song ‘Hard to say I am sorry’ by Chicago (1982) as ‘*Sunao ni narenakute*’ (cannot become *sunao*) renders this very well. It reflects the idea of seemingly giving in but in fact being able to behave *sunao* opens the path for further talk and/or negotiation.

What most of the above mentioned terms have in common is, that they give scripts (or frames) for where, when and how emotions can be shown or should be controlled. This does not mean

that Japanese are not individualistic. Their rules (Yamada, 1997) are just different from American, and by this also German, rules, especially when it comes to place, timing and situation in which an individual is allowed to vent his/her feelings. Moosmüller (1997) as well as Condon (1984) give concrete examples of Japanese behavior, like being unclear, indirect, controlled, and not advertising oneself, referring to the actual in-group etc. Watanabe (2006) shows in her study of German and Japanese business managers that the Japanese managers frame their opinions quite differently, stating them at the end of their contribution and referring to others or the actual situation in the beginning. Many Japanese still feel embarrassed or even experience a loss of face when being singled out, whether positively or negatively (Inoue, 1977). In neither case will they say much and mostly refer to their in-group to whom they feel alternately indebted or ashamed of (Condon, 1984). My analysis will thus examine whether the two Japanese soccer players, who were in a sense singled out by their (non)-nomination, reacted in accordance with the above-mentioned traits.

German culture and verbal communicative style.

Unlike scholarly research on Japanese culture, there is not the equivalent amount of research on German culture. One, or the major, reason for this is that most research on communication, culture and interculturality has been generally done by Western countries on other countries which are different, whatever this means, from the 'West'. In this respect, as Germany is part of this 'Western culture', its culture was not considered as that important to research on, except in relation to the Second World War and Hitler.

Stereotypes have of course always existed about German character traits and verbal communicative style. However, it has been only within about the last 30-40 years that research, generally because of economic necessities and globalization, has tried to find evidence of which traits and styles are stereotyped, which are not, why and what the underlying historical reasons are. Although Madame de Staël wrote very intellectually and insightfully about Germany in 'De l'Allemagne' at the very beginning of the 19th century, it was not until the 20th century that academia considered 'Western' character traits and communicative style worthy of research.

Hall (1959) and Hall & Hall (1985) were some of the first authors to write about German traits in their research on time and space. They attributed to Germans traits such as being monochronic, low-context, orderly and very much adhering to rules. Hofstede (1980) ranked Germans as high in their uncertainty avoidance factor, meaning they put safety and security first and risk-taking low. A criticism of Hofstede's research is that his results are relative. They are high in comparison to England but low in comparison to Japan. Nees (2000) in comparing Germans with Americans described the former as preferring long analysis and explanations, and thorough planning. He also noted that Germans are very much focused on competency (compartmentalization), have a very direct communication style (not diplomatic, right to the

point without personal references), and are secretive (closed doors), etc. At the same time he concedes that Germans are very consensus-oriented, but that this consensus is reached through direct and tough communication in official meetings, in which it is very important to voice one's opinion. Frankness is more valued than diplomacy or personal relations. Nees also describes how Americans are seen by Germans and that both are biased by their respective cultural values. The author shows clearly how different the two Western cultures are, yet which seem so alike from a Japanese point of view.

Only a few authors compare German and Japanese culture directly and within their works the focus is mostly on Japan. However, even then certain traits are involuntarily revealed by explanations like the following one, where Stahl (1999) gives the advice to always use a native interpreter. According to him an interpreter not only gives time to think, even if one understands and speaks the language, but in important negotiations s/he can also avoid serious conflict by rendering exclamations like "that's completely unacceptable" or "no need to discuss this any further" (Stahl, 1999, p. 42, translation by the author) into culturally acceptable expressions.

This demonstrates clearly how direct, non-diplomatic and fixed on content only German communicative style is or can be. Watanabe (2006) analyzed recordings of Japanese-German negotiations conducted in English. Her research shows that the German executives were very task-oriented, hardly referring to the previous speaker at a speaker-turn, and very much focused on the topic at hand. On a sub-note, this also illustrates the level of interculturality of a person who can speak a foreign language but does not know the cultural values that go with it and merely substitutes them for his own. Although the German executives spoke English, they used/spoke it the same way they used/spoke German, with all the German traits, values, customs etc.

Just like Japanese values and customs, German ones only become obvious in comparison with the values and customs of other cultures. Many of these have been compiled by S. Schroll-Machl (2002) and S. Schroll-Machl (2003). Although it is not correct to equal countries with cultures, it is sometimes unavoidable especially as many references continue to do so. I would like to stress the point though, that there are many sub-cultures in each country and the values and customs mentioned are not absolute but only representative of the major tendencies in the respective countries.

In contrast to several other countries like the US, France and China, German cultural standards show: a) a high directness in interpersonal communication, b) strong rule-orientation, c) a clear distinction, if not separation of private space and time, and d) a distinct tendency towards task-orientation (Schroll-Machl 2003).

To some countries, like the US, France and some Eastern European countries, Germans seem to be both authoritarian and believers in authority. Other countries, however, perceive Germans to be strongly individualistic (Schroll-Machl 2002). This seems to be contradictory, but in fact both

findings tell more about the prevailing values of the perceiving countries than about German values. Members of these countries will more readily notice traits which are not the norm in their own culture. Their judgments will, of course, be based on their own internalized value-system. In order to understand such a seemingly contradictory image like authority-believers/ authoritarian and at the same time individualistic, it is necessary to look at the historical development of the principal German values.

Schroll-Machl (2002) gives several reasons for the strong German sense of duty, obligation and rule-orientation, like: a) Protestantism, b) a patchwork of innumerable German countries and territories of all sizes until 1871, with each of them following a strict system of rules and regulations, which were well controlled; and c) Prussian militarism and bureaucracy. According to Schroll-Machl (2002) the points given above are partly responsible for the German directness (low-context). Another reason was a general disregard of the nobility, which seemed to be unreliable and hypocrite, and did not accept members of the increasingly powerful bourgeoisie as marriageable partners. This strengthened the acceptance and use of the direct language of the common people, which was German. An old saying illustrates this very well: “Nun wollen wir mal deutsch reden!” which simply means, “Let’s talk business and not beat around the bush.” Another consequence of the above is that privacy and private belongings are highly valued and sacrosanct (Schroll-Machl, 2002).

Therefore, in discussions the focus will usually be on the task, fact or subject at question. Interpersonal relations are not taken into consideration and verbal expressions can be very direct, like pointing out any mistake or criticizing the person responsible without considering face or the other. A person, who plans thoroughly, is self-disciplined, and works hard, will earn the trust and acceptance of his/her colleagues. He/she will not achieve this by informal interpersonal talk and or relations (Schroll-Machl, 2002).

It will be interesting to see, whether the two German soccer players, who were in a sense singled out by their (non)-nomination, reacted in accordance with the above mentioned traits.

Analysis of the reaction of the two Japanese soccer-players

I would like to clarify one point: I am not exploring mass-media communication nor are non-verbal expressions included in my analysis. My sole basis of analysis is the publicly made comments of the four players.¹

Tatsuhiko Kubo was not nominated (for the second time - it already happened to him once in 2002), although most people were sure he would be (Sports Nippon Shimbunsha, May 16, 2006, front page). His reaction at the press conference in the evening of May 15, 2006, was as follows: “It’s unfortunate. Once again I was not chosen (I already had a slight premonition that it would happen,

¹ The translations of the Japanese and the German comments were done by the author as well as by a completely bilingual (Japanese-English) person.

but I also did not fully anticipate it). I wish that my team-mates, who have done a lot of training and participated in many matches, will do their best.” (Sports Nippon Shimbunsha, May 16, 2006, front page). As can be seen from his choice of words he only expresses his sadness, without bearing any bitterness. By immediately switching to his fellow players, and expressing his hope that they do their best, he is referring to his in-group.

“This World Cup I expected even more to participate than in the last one. But, these last two matches were also a bit worrying. This year I’ll be 30 and it won’t be easier..... I felt my condition improve day by day..... But it can’t be helped as the coach has his own opinion about it..... There is a match coming and I want to do my best for Marinos (the club Kubo plays for).”

Kubo expresses the hopes he had in a very moderate way, soon admitting that there had been weak points in his last two matches. He refers to his age, by this hinting that he wanted to be chosen as it very well might be the last chance for him. But he does not express this desire directly, only hinting at it. He does mention that he feels his condition had improved. However, he does not stress this point, but quickly gives it a fatalistic turn - ‘can’t be helped’- and only shows slightly his irritation by mentioning that the coach had a different viewpoint about his condition. After that he changes the topic and refers to his other in-group (Soccer Club Yokohama Marinos) for whom he wants to do his best, thereby showing his loyalty.

An interesting episode was related by the same newspaper on May 16, 2006: “After the press conference Kubo was met by his wife and his two daughters (aged 7 and 1). The older daughter, upon the news of her father’s non-nomination, only commented: ‘I don’t like (literally ‘hate’) Zico’.”

This utterance shows what a child is still, in a way, allowed to say and an adult is not. It gives evidence to Hamaguchi’s (1985) report that “the straightforward claim of the naked ego” (p. 303) is experienced as childish. Kubo himself might share the same feeling as expressed by his daughter but he certainly did not say so.

Seiichiroh Maki was the player whose nomination to the Japanese national team was the least expected (Nippon Shimbunsha, May 16, 2006, front page). The first surprise was his nomination and the second surprise was that he received the number 11 jersey. ““What, I am the number 11?” and then he was speechless for a moment. Only famous forwards had so far been given this number”. However, according to the same newspaper, his surprise quickly changed into a sense of mission: “The number 11 also means that he will have to work together with Shunsuke Nakamura”.

In sportsnavi.com on May 16, 2006, Maki said:

“There is no point in just being chosen. I want to be myself when I play and I want to motivate the team to win every match. Of course the goal is to win the World Cup, the least of preparation for playing when putting on the Japanese jersey.There are other players who didn’t get nominated because of me. Therefore I want to deliver a performance on a satisfactory level which I won’t be ashamed of.”

Maki dispels his joy on being chosen. He quickly draws attention to the team as a whole and stresses what he wants to do for them. He also shows, although not mentioning his name directly, consideration towards the non-nominated Kubo and fears the shame (*haji*) if he does not deliver the performance expected of him.

In Sports Nippon Shimbunsha on May 18, 2006, Maki's comments concerning his nomination were as follows:

“I was surprised but calm and not overly excited. Many things crossed my mind, for example what to do to participate in matches and how to make the team win.”

Here he too downplays his joy and rather stresses his surprise. Maki's biggest concern, however, seems to be how he can best participate and contribute to the team's success. He further states:

“The World Cup is not a place to play around. The goal is of course to win the Cup. Not playing like a gentleman but playing aggressively is what I want. If I can do my best then I am sure I will be able to do something, and I think that's why Zico chose me.”

Maki stresses the seriousness of the matter and concentrates on what he intends to do. In the end he shows slight self-confidence.

Analysis of the reaction of the two German soccer-players

For logistical reasons it was not possible to obtain printed German sports newspapers. I had to rely on online news only. It seems, however, that the German players did not give such extensive press conferences as the Japanese ones right after the announcement of the (non)-nomination. Another impression, which would be worthwhile to explore further in subsequent studies, is that German newspapers, both printed and online, prefer to report indirectly about the players' behaviors or utterances instead of quoting them directly. Direct quotations seem to be reserved for interviews. These two reasons may explain why for the two German players only few direct quotations could be found.

Spiegel online reported on May 16, 2006, that Kevin Kuranyi was not nominated, although many thought he would be, as he had been playing for the national team for quite a while. The online newspaper titled the article with a quotation from the player: “My world collapsed.” Kuranyi had been informed about his non-nomination by the national team coach directly by phone. In the article he was further quoted:

“Again and again I asked myself: Why of all people me?I am speechless..... I am utterly disappointed and I am going to have several sleepless nights.I know that I didn't play the best of seasons, but at the beginning of Klinsmann's time as coach of the national team I scored goals regularly.”

Kuranyi expresses his disappointment openly. He does not refer in any way to the team or his team-mates. Kuranyi voices frankly what he feels and thinks, and even announces what this disappointment will cause him (sleepless nights). He openly disagrees with the coach. Kuranyi slightly admits that the last season was not his best, but he immediately tries to justify himself by

stressing his top-form at the beginning of Klinsmann's time as coach. He is completely convinced that his non-nomination is not justified ("Why of all people me?") and, it should be said, many domestic and foreign newspapers shared his opinion. Kuranyi, in his first reaction, concentrates his attention solely on himself and his play, which are in this context the fact or task to be accomplished.

On May 15, 2006, Spiegel Online reported about the players who had been surprisingly nominated on to the national team. The biggest surprise was David Odonkor, who had so far never played for the national team, nor ever participated in an international game. National team coach Klinsmann had contacted him for the first time about his nomination on May 15. However, Klinsmann admitted that he had observed Odonkor for the past six months. The online newspaper quotes Odonkor as follows:

"I am immensely happy. This is a great honour, an accelerating incentive and a big challenge for me. It is my impression that the national team coach attentively observed and registered the performance of the junior generation players from Borussia Dortmund in the past season (The club Odonkor plays for). That's why I managed to catch the train to the World Cup at the last minute."

The young player (22) expresses his joy and happiness directly. He only refers to what the decision of the coach means to him personally. He does not refer to his club-team or to the national team and his team-mates. Although Odonkor was contacted by Klinsmann at the proverbial last minute, it is quite clear that Odonkor believes it was his ability rather than luck that merited his selection. Rather it is the other way round, because the national team coach did his job well and observed the junior generation players attentively, the coach was able to detect Odonkor's qualities.

Conclusion

This study is only a pilot-study and by no means complete. Out of logistical and financial reasons, the number of sources is quite limited. Therefore only the published direct quotes of the four players could be taken into consideration. Broadening the number of sources, to include additional printed newspapers, magazines, video clips etc. would allow me to investigate not only non-verbal expressions, but also to analyze the comments of the media about the remarks of the players, and how those are influenced by their respective cultures. Further research on the above would certainly enhance the findings of this study.

Nevertheless by comparing the utterances of the nominated/non-nominated players from each country, it becomes quite clear that they are in accord with their respective cultural values, concerning official verbal communication. The difference is most apparent for the two surprisingly non-nominated players. The Japanese player Kubo shows his disappointment only slightly (although his picture speaks volumes, but this is not the subject of this article), and quickly refers to his club-mates and the responsibility he has towards them. Sometimes Kubo expresses his feelings and opinions but quickly shifts the focus from himself to the group; either

his club, or the national team. This is in complete contrast to Kuranyi, who never refers to a group, neither his club nor the national team. He expresses his feelings and his great disappointment directly (“a whole world collapsed for me”). Kuranyi is not ashamed to openly show the difficulty he has in accepting his non-nomination (“why of all people me?”), and he stresses that his nomination would have been justified.

The contrast between the two surprisingly nominated players is not as strong as between Kubo and Kuranyi, but still offers worthwhile areas of analysis. Right from the start, their respective verbal utterances are different. The Japanese player Maki stresses surprise, but the German player Odonkor expresses happiness. Surprise is linked with feeling lucky while happiness displays a feeling of acknowledgment. Maki quickly refers to his in-group, the national team, and what he could do for them. Odonkor mentions neither his club nor the national team. Here again the difference in focus is apparent.

The two Japanese players always refer to interpersonal relations, but the two German players refer only to their personal feelings and their own competency. The communication style of the latter is direct, without any embellishments. No reference to any kind of group is made. The focus in verbal communication style is diametrically opposed to the Japanese verbal communication style. What is considered important within one set of value does not hold in the other set. The four soccer players very much confirm the findings by Condon (1984), Bachnik (1986), Stahl (1999), Nees (2000) and Schroll-Machl (2002, 2003) and others mentioned above. Although many claims are made that in a time of internationalization, globalization and the greater importance of international networks (and soccer should naturally be one of them), differences between cultures will increasingly diminish, in reality this is not the case as the above findings have shown. Respective behavioral traits, communicative styles and value sets are deeply rooted in a culture. These are continuously transmitted by innumerable small and large actions carried out by each member of a culture either as an individual or as a group. Cultures change. But they change slowly as the above findings have shown.

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サッカー選手の振る舞いに及ぼす
文化の影響とその理由

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